RAC — Richmond AIDS Consortium

RICHMOND AIDS CONSORTIUM
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History and mission. In the fall of 1989, eighteen Community Programs for Clinical Research on AIDS (CPCRA) were established across the United States. They are sponsored and funded by the federal government through the National Institutes of Health, through its National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. One of these CPCRAs is the Richmond AIDS Consortium (RAC).

The RAC is a group of physicians in the greater Richmond metropolitan area who are committed to caring for HIV-infected persons and to contributing to the advancement of medical knowledge through community-based clinical drug trials. These physicians conduct studies in a variety of settings in an effort to answer medical questions and to solve problems which limit their patients' daily activities and quality of life.

The primary goal of the RAC is to enhance research capabilities in Central Virginia and to improve care for persons with HIV infection. Community health care providers and HIV-infected patients will have greater opportunities to participate in medical research. A particular focus of the program is to reach persons who have previously been under-represented in HIV-related studies.

Program and Services. RAC conducts research on HIV and AIDS through clinical drug trials. The trials examine prevention and treatment therapies for HIV-related opportunistic infections as well as treatments against progression of HIV disease. The same physician and research nurse closely follow each patient through the duration of the studies. A social worker is available to assist patients with social, financial, and emotional needs.

RAC Features:

- Access to state-of-the-art therapies and the newest strategies for HIV clinical care.
- Access to experimental drugs and therapies.
- Access to the newest information on HIV / AIDS medical care and research.
- Access to information on community resources and services.

Benefits and Risks:

- Patients may be among the first to be helped by a new drug.
- Patients have the opportunity to take positive action and help themselves.
- Patients have the opportunity to talk to others with HIV infection.
- Study medications, lab work, and office visits may coincide with what patients already receive and are provided free of charge.
- Patients may experience side-effects.

- Medications may be ineffective or even harmful.

Frequently asked questions:

Q: What are clinical trials?

A: Clinical drug trials are medical research studies with experimental drugs. Some trials examine the effectiveness of new drugs while some compare new drugs with existing medications. In some studies, different dosages of the same drugs are compared to determine which regimen works better. Studies often use placebos, a pill without active ingredients. Patients in the control group who take placebos are compared to those who take the active medication to see which group of patients does better.

Q: How do clinical trials work?

A: Patients who are interested in participating in a trial do so voluntarily. They are interviewed and screened to see if they are eligible for any studies. Sometimes screening involves lab work such as a blood test. If accepted into a trial, patients receive study medication free of charge as well as required lab work and a portion of their office visit charge. Study participants must follow strict guidelines and rules while in a trial, including keeping regularly scheduled appointments. These appointments are important so that the patients can be watched carefully for side-effects or any other problems that may occur.

Q: Who is eligible to participate in a trial?

A: Each trial has specific and different requirements for eligibility. Only persons who are HIV positive and whose medical history and test results meet these requirements are eligible to participate. Most patients do not meet the criteria for every trial. Those who do not qualify for one trial are encouraged to ask about others; new trials continue to open.

Q: How long do trials last?

A: Each trial is different, but they usually last between six months and two years. The number of office visits required also varies with each trial, but they are usually more frequent in the beginning and gradually become less frequent. Usually, trials begin with one visit per week, then space out to once every two months as the study progresses.

Q: What is informed consent?

A: Before patients begin a trial, they are asked to sign an Informed Consent form. The form explains exactly how the trial will work and the patient's role in it. A physician or research nurse will discuss the form with the patient and will answer any questions the patient may have. It is important that study participants understand what it means to be part of a clinical drug trial.

Q: What if a study participant wants to drop out of a trial?

A: A patient may leave a study at any time, and the decision to withdraw will not affect the patient's medical care in any way.

Q: What about confidentiality?

A: All information regarding a patient's participation in a trial is confidential. Study participants are assigned a unique number, and records are identified only by that number. All trials are set up according to strict ethical

A new RAC site is being established at:

Eastern Virginia Medical School

For more information, contact:

Dr. Evelyn Fisher
(804) 828-9711

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principles, and confidentiality is assured.

Q: How can a patient find out more information?

A: To learn more about clinical drug trials on HIV and AIDS, patients should consult their physicians or may contact the RAC at the address above.

Submitted by: Lisa Cox, Richmond AIDS Consortium